

# WHAT IS *Williams v. California?*

On May 17, 2000, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), along with other civil rights organizations, filed a lawsuit against the State of California because of the terrible conditions in many of its public schools (the *Williams v. California* case). Parents, students, and teachers argued that the State is failing to provide thousands of public school students, particularly those in low-income communities and communities of color, with the basic necessities required for an education.

They argued that the State's failure to provide these bare minimum necessities to all public school students in California violates the state constitution, as well as state and federal requirements that all students be given equal access to public education without regard to race, color, or national origin.

In August 2004, a settlement (legal agreement) was announced. The settlement requires that all students have books and that their schools be clean and safe. It takes steps to make sure that students have qualified teachers and that schools deliver these important resources to students. The settlement provides nearly \$1 billion to accomplish these goals.

For more info, please visit  
[www.decentschools.org](http://www.decentschools.org)  
and  
[www.aclu-sc.org](http://www.aclu-sc.org)

All public school students, parents,  
and teachers are affected by this  
settlement.

## FAQs

**Q. May anyone file a complaint?**

**A. Yes.** Any person or organization may file a complaint.

**Q. Do I have to put my name on my complaint?**

**A. No.** However, if you want the principal or district official to report to you how the problem was fixed, you must include your name and contact information.

**Q. Do I have to use a particular form to file a complaint?**

**A. No.** Your school must have complaint forms available, but you may use any form you want. An easy to use complaint form is available at [www.decentschools.org](http://www.decentschools.org). Alternatively, you can call the toll-free phone number below and request one.

**Q. What days do not count as "working days"?**

**A. Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays.**

**Q. Should I make and keep a copy of my complaint?**

**A. Yes.**

**Q. Who can I contact if I want more information or would like help filing a complaint or an appeal?**

**A. Email [williamsinfo@aclu-sc.org](mailto:williamsinfo@aclu-sc.org) or call the toll-free number below.**

**WILLIAMS TOLL-FREE HOTLINE**

**1-877-532-2533**



LIBERTY | JUSTICE | EQUALITY

1313 W. 8th ST., LOS ANGELES, CA 90017  
PHONE (213) 977-9500 FAX (213) 977-5297  
[WWW.ACLU-SC.ORG](http://WWW.ACLU-SC.ORG)

# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

**YOU HAVE THE RIGHT  
TO A CLEAN AND  
SAFE SCHOOL**

**YOU HAVE THE RIGHT  
TO HAVE A BOOK TO USE  
IN CLASS AND AT HOME**

**YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO  
A QUALIFIED TEACHER**

*This brochure explains  
how to use the  
Williams complaint process  
to enforce these rights.*

**WILLIAMS v. CALIFORNIA**

CURRENT AS OF FEBRUARY 25, 2008

## Williams COMPLAINT PROCESS

Cal. Education Code Section 35186

You can file a complaint with your school if:

- (1) You do not have a book or instructional materials to use in class and to take home; or
- (2) The condition of a school building or facility poses a threat to the health and safety of students or staff; or
- (3) You do not have a permanent teacher assigned to your class at the beginning of the semester, or your teacher is not qualified to teach your class; or
- (4) A restroom is not fully operational, well maintained and cleaned, stocked with supplies, and open during school hours when students are not in class; or an insufficient number of restrooms are open while students are in classes.

If you file a complaint, the principal must investigate and fix the problem within 30 working days. If the principal does not have authority to fix the problem, she or he must forward the complaint to the school district. The district must then provide a solution within 30 working days of receiving the complaint (but no later than 40 working days after you first filed your complaint with the principal). A written response, if requested, is due within 45 working days.

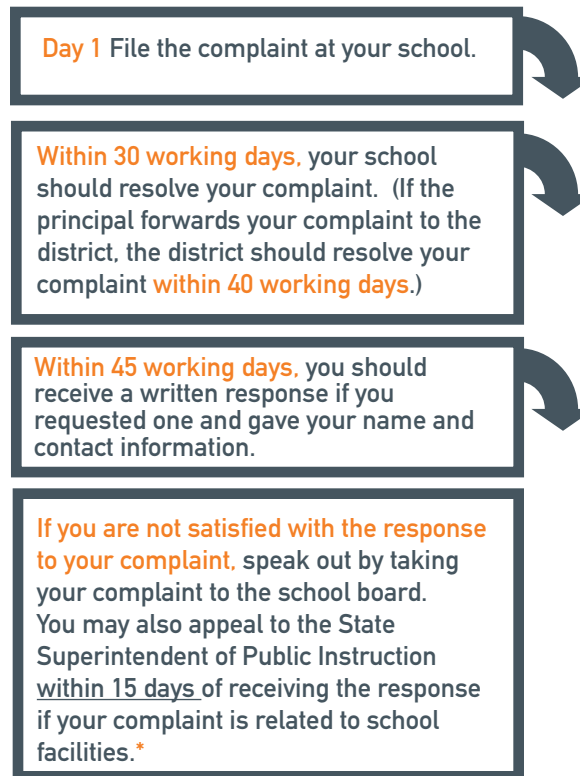
If you are unsatisfied with the response to your complaint (from the principal or district), you may:

- (1) speak at a school board meeting to explain why the resolution was unsatisfactory and request that the board take action; and
- (2) file an appeal with the State Superintendent of Public Instruction within 15 days of receiving the response if your complaint is related to school facilities.\*

## HOW TO FILE A COMPLAINT

1. Find a complaint form: By law, a NOTICE should be posted in each classroom describing these rights and where to find complaint forms.
2. Fill out the form: If you give your name and ask for a response, the principal or district official must report to you within 45 working days how the problem was fixed. If you file your complaint in a language other than English, the response must be written in that language (and English) if it is spoken by at least 15% of the students at your school. You may file an anonymous complaint, but you will not receive a written response.
3. Turn in the complaint form: The form should tell you where to file it with the principal.

### Williams COMPLAINT TIMELINE



\*Please contact us if you would like help with filing an appeal.

## POSSIBLE REASONS FOR FILING A COMPLAINT

(Note: These are examples, not the only possible reasons.)

### INSUFFICIENT TEXTBOOKS/INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

- You don't have a book to use in class, or you have to share a book.
- You don't have a book to use at home.
- Your book is in poor condition, missing pages, or so damaged that you can't read it.

### EMERGENCY OR URGENT FACILITIES CONDITIONS THAT POSE A THREAT TO HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The heating, ventilation, fire sprinkler, or air-conditioning system is broken.
- The school is infested with pests or vermin (for example, rats).
- School windows are broken or exterior doors or gates will not lock and pose a security risk.
- A building is damaged, creating a hazardous or uninhabitable condition.

### TEACHER VACANCIES OR MISASSIGNMENTS

- Your class is not assigned a permanent teacher within the first 20 working days of the semester (for example, you have a series of substitute teachers).
- A teacher is assigned to teach a class for which the teacher lacks subject matter competency.
- A teacher who lacks proper credentials or training to teach English learners is assigned to teach a class in which more than 20% of the students are English learners.

### LOCKED, POORLY MAINTAINED OR BROKEN RESTROOMS